

An Analysis of Gerund and To Infinitive in Argumentative Essays

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Abstract

This article is about gerund and to infinitive usages made by students in their argumentative essays. The research identified grammatical problems occurred in argumentative essays. The theories of Dulay about errors and Harmer about grammar were used. The writers used taxonomies in classifying errors into four types which are omission, addition, misformation and misordering. The method used was library research. In collecting the data, the researchers used students' papers taken from two classes of a university. The writers concluded that the most common problem in using gerund and to infinitive is misformation. Students found it difficult to use gerunds and to infinitives. It also showed that practice is needed to solve the grammatical problems faced by the students.

Key Words: *gerund, grammatical problem, to infinitive.*

Introduction

Learning English needs some skills and components that should be mastered. Among those skills, the most difficult ones for students is mastering tenses and grammar. Grammar is important because people will not be able to communicate and understand each other without it. According to Nasr, grammar is an important part of any language. Just as there is no language without sounds (at least no live or oral language), so there is no language without grammar (1985: 52). Based on this statement, grammar plays important rules when learning English. It must be understood and mastered by learners in order to make a sentence or paragraph grammatical and thus meaningful.

The functions of gerund are not only as a subject but also as object, complements, preposition object, and some other cases usually found in both written and spoken forms. As important as gerund, to infinitives are also used very often in sentences. The use of gerund and to infinitive should be understood by everyone who are studying English.

Both gerund and to infinitive are introduced to students since they first learn English. In Indonesia English is taught as a compulsory subject from schools up to even some semesters of college level. It is also possible that children in kindergarten in this era of globalization are taught English. However, there are some difficulties or problems faced by the students in using grammar even though they have been learning it for a quite long time. The result of learning grammar is still considered unsatisfactory. It is thus inevitable for students who are learning English to deepen their understanding on the use of gerunds and to infinitives.

In this research, the writers focused on one genre of writing which is argumentative essays. The essays were made by students in the fifth semester in a university in 2016.

Theory and Method

According to Allen in *Living English Structure*, a gerund is defined as the part of the verbs that ends in *-ing* which has the force of a noun as well as that of a verb. A gerund is the *-ing* form of a verb used in the same way as a noun or pronoun (1991: 177). It can be used as subject, object, or complement. It carries different functions from verbs in sentences. A participle looks the same with gerund in its form but it functions as adjective or verb meanwhile a gerund functions as noun.

Gerunds have several rules in sentences. Points to pay attention to are:

1. A gerund is a verbal ending in *-ing* and is used as a noun.
2. A gerund phrase consists of a gerund plus modifier(s), object(s), and/or complement(s).
3. A gerund and gerund phrase virtually never require punctuation.

To infinitive consists of *to* and a verb in its simple form but doesn't function as the main verb in the sentence. The function of *to infinitive* according to Eastwood (1994: 147-156) in *Oxford Guide to English Grammar* is as subject, as complement, and as modifier.

The researchers obtained the data source from both lecturer and students. The data sources were in form of argumentative essays made by the students in fifth semester. After reading the data sources comprehensively, the researchers underlined the sentences that contained gerunds and to infinitives. The next step is identifying the mistakes found in those sentences. Having identified the problems, the researchers coded and classified the data into relevant classification. After having the data classified, the writers analyzed them by focusing on the mistakes made by the students. The last step of this research is drawing conclusion. The researchers concluded all the results and prepared for the report.

Discussion

3.1 Omission

Omission occurs when there is an element omitted by the learners. Omission found by the writers cover two main parts which are omission of gerunds and omission of to infinitives. Both are divided into three subtypes which are (1) Letter Omission, (2) Word Omission, and (3) Suffix Omission. Three of them appear in sentences used by the students in their papers. The case of omission can be seen below:

3.1.1 Letter Omission

Letters are important in their function to build a word. When a word is not in its correct form (not having letters that are needed to construct it), readers will fail to refer to what the writer is talking about. Some of such cases are found in the students' papers. Their sentences are produced with incomplete letters. This occurs in writing gerunds and to infinitives. However, for gerund case, the writers only found one letter omission in the papers. The errors occurring the most are related to *to infinitives*. Letter omission of to infinitive and gerund can be seen below:

Student's sentence	Correct Sentence
She <u>tring</u> to <u>fid</u> the truth from one question to another questions, and it also happened when Emmet give question to Sacrator, he give question and finally find the truth.	She was <u>trying</u> to <u>find</u> the truth from one question to another. It also happened when Emmet gave a question to Sacrator. He gave question and finally found the truth.

Omission that occurs in the sentences above implies two issues. First, the word *tring* is not in its right form. *Tring* in sentence above refers to the word *try* that should be written *trying*. So, the case here is categorized as letter omission of gerund. *Trying* in the datum functions as subject. Second, the word *to fid* in the table given should be written *to find*. Letter *n* is omitted in that construction. It can be concluded, thus, that the sentence contains letter omission of gerund and to infinitive.

4.1.2 Word Omission

As described by the data presented below, the words omitted from the constructions of either gerund and to infinitive occurring in the papers that the researchers analyzed have something to do with the students' awareness of how to use gerund and to infinitive.

Student's sentence	Correct Sentence
In this topic, <u>I</u> interested <u>try</u> to criticize the Jokowi's Program that was told in pre- General Election that was held in the end of 2014.	In this topic, <u>I am</u> interested in <u>trying</u> to criticize Jokowi's program that was introduced in his pre- General Election campaign held in the end of 2014.

In the datum presented above, the student writing this sentence omitted preposition *in* before the verb *try* and used the verb itself in its simple form. The word *interested* should be followed by *in*. Further, the verb *try* should be in its present participle form *trying*. So, the correct sentence is *In this topic, I am interested in trying to criticize Jokowi's program that was introduced in his pre- General Election campaign that was held in the end of 2014.*

Another example related to this word omission is presented here below. The student who wrote this essay omitted the verb *be* from the sentence, leaving the phrase *to far away* grammatically ill-formed. This implies two possibilities. First, the writer might think that *far* is a verb. Second, the reason might has something to do with lack

of knowledge on how to use *to infinitives*, especially in a nominal sentence like this. Either one, the writer omitted the verb *be* from the sentence.

Student's sentence	Correct Sentence
One important thing that if we want <u>to far</u> away from demons, we have to add our faith in God.	One important thing if we want <u>to be far</u> away from demons is we have to increase our faith in God.

From the data presented, it can be concluded that word omission occurring in the papers vary in forms. This indicates that the students understanding and problems related to this notion also vary.

4.2 Addition

Addition errors occur when the students employ unnecessary elements in their sentences. The case of addition is found a lot in the papers. The writers classified them into some subtypes.

4.2.1 Letter Addition

This sentence part below poses a case in which the writer added another letter to the word *be*. In general, students do the same mistakes when typing or writing other words but in the case of gerund, the factor surely has to do with knowledge of how to make *-ing* form of verbs.

Student's sentence	Correct Sentence
If we questioning, where is our God when we suffering or when we close <u>to beeing</u> danger, ...	If we question where is our God when we suffer or when we are close <u>to being</u> in danger, ...

From the data analyzed, the researchers came to a conclusion that in addition to providing the students with theoretical knowledge of gerunds and to infinitives, having them practice is also necessary.

4.2.2 Word Addition

Adding words without knowing the construction of a good sentence and the writer's purpose will cause grammatical errors. In the first datum shown below, the student inserted determiner *the* which makes the sentence ungrammatical. Seen from the correct version of the sentence on the second column, *the* should be omitted in order for the sentence to be correct. An additional correction is needed for the phrase *as much as* because the student is talking about a countable noun. Thus, in the correction, the word *much* is changed to *many*.

Student's sentence	Correct Sentence
Then no problem <u>in the collecting</u> the material as much as possible.	There is no problem <u>in collecting</u> the materials as many as possible.

In the other sample provided below, the writer added auxiliary *could* between *to* and the verb *understand*. This makes the sentence structurally incorrect. In the version made by the researchers *could* is not used, leaving the phrase *to understand* alone. One might find it more acceptable to correct the clause by changing it into *humans need to be able to understand*. This option is acceptable but as proven by the data obtained by the researchers, it is quite complex for the students in this level to arrive at such application of grammatical notion.

Student's sentence	Correct Sentence
So that, the human need <u>to could</u> understand about God and His words.	So, human beings need <u>to understand</u> God and His words.

In the data collected by the researchers, there are many similar cases found like this. These data show that in addition to other grammatical issues, students also need to focus on how to use gerunds and to infinitives.

4.2.3 Word and Letter Addition

Adding a letter to a word also causes error. In the datum presented below, for instance, some other mistakes also occur other than letter addition.

Student's sentence	Correct Sentence
From the questions, I <u>start want to eksplain</u> more about the arguments of God based on Thomas Aquinas's argument and I will respon the arguments	From the questions, I <u>start to explain</u> more about the arguments of God based on Thomas Aquinas's Argument and I will respond to the arguments.

The first addition, as being obvious from the datum is the presence of letter *r* between the first *t* and *a* in the word *start*. It is possible that the word was just mistyped but another interesting issue follows in the word *explain*. Looking at the word written by the student, letter *x* was replaced by letters *k* and *s*. From the perspective of Bahasa Indonesia, the student's linguistic background, both *x* and *ks* carry the same pronunciation. Thus, it is linguistically possible that this letter addition or change from *x* to *ks* is contributed by the linguistic background.

4.3 Misformation

Grammatical problem that commonly happens in the data is misformation. This is related to structure and form of verbs or words in sentences. The cases found by the writers cover misformation of *gerunds* and misformation of *to infinitives*.

4.3.1 Misformation of Gerund

From the data presented here below, it can be seen that in addition to make mistake in the formation of the verb, the student producing the sentence also made mistakes in some other grammatical notions. The first one is related to the form of *have* which should be *has* and the second related to the phrase *the excellent education*. There is also another issue related to the diction of the word *create*.

Student's sentence	Correct Sentence
So the government have to create good human resources <u>by make</u> the excellent education.	So, the government has to develop good human resources <u>by making</u> the education excellent.

In relation to the gerund, the datum shows how the student used the verb *make* in an incorrect form. Instead of using the present participle form, he used the simple form of the verb. From the data processed by the researchers, there are a lot of cases like this. The students use verbs in their simple form after prepositions like *by* or *about*.

4.3.2 Misformation of To Infinitive

Misformation of *to infinitives* found by writers consists of several types. Cases occurring the most are related to addition. The types are presented in the following sub points.

4.3.2.1 Verb Tenses

There are two examples presented here below in which different students made the same mistakes in forming to infinitives. In the first, the student put marker of singular subject *s* in the end of the verb *make*. In the second, the student added the same marker to the verb *pass*. These make the *to infinitive phrases* ill-formed. Here the students were aware of the rule of having singular subjects but not with the exception for *to infinitives*.

Student's sentence	Correct Sentence
He didn't wanted <u>to makes</u> his students get good score.	He didn't want <u>to make</u> his students get good scores.
One of the tests that sometimes difficult <u>to passes</u> is grammar test.	One of the tests that is sometimes difficult <u>to pass</u> is grammar test.

Another mistake here interesting to discuss is the presence of past *-ed* in the end of the verb *want* in the first datum. This might seem structurally acceptable but as the sentence is talking about a past event and that the past tense has been shown by the auxiliary *did*, none should be needed for the verb.

4.3.2.2 Using Nouns

The last part of addition found by the writers is the adding of *-ion*. This is one of suffixes used to derive nouns from verbs. In this case, students need to understand that a *to infinitive* must be followed a verb. So, the verb should not be changed into noun.

Student's sentence	Correct Sentence
Smart phone now are not used only <u>to communication</u> but also to do other activity.	Smart phone now are used not only <u>to communicate</u> but also to do other activities.
People need to know <u>to operation</u> certain gadget or computer.	People need to know how <u>to operate</u> certain gadgets or computers.

As seen above, the two examples contain nouns as if the phrases were to infinitives. In the revised versions of the sentences, those nouns were changed into verbs, making the phrases *to communicate* and *to operate* grammatically well-formed. In addition to this issue, the students also mistyped communication by omitting one *m* and misplaced the adverb *not* before the verb in the first example. In the second, the words *gadget* and *computer* lose their plural marker *s*.

4.3.3 Gerund Form (Addition of *-ing*)

To infinitive must be followed by verb one or verb in the simple form. However, the data the researchers analyze, to infinitives are followed by present participle which is not grammatically acceptable. Here are the examples:

Student's sentence	Correct Sentence
People have <u>to understanding</u> many things about this life.	People have <u>to understand</u> many things about this life.
Woman is also deserve <u>to struggling</u> their rights in order to get betterment in their life and also respect.	Women also deserve <u>to struggle</u> for their rights in order to get respect and betterment in their life.

Those examples above employ present participles *understanding* and *struggling* as if they were acceptable grammatically after the word *to*. In order for the sentences to be correct, to infinitive phrases like *to understand* and *to struggle* should be employed. Seen from the second example, the writer also made mistake in the form of *woman* which should be plural and the presence of *is* side by side with the verb *deserve* in simple form.

4.4 Misordering

Misordering refers to misplacement of a word in a sentence. In the data collected by the researchers, students often misplaced words especially in the construction of *to infinitive*.

Student's sentence	Correct Sentence
He said that there is movement that <u>must we to accept</u> that the first mover which is God.	He said that there is movement that we <u>must accept</u> (understand) and that the first mover is God.

In the sample above, there is misordering between *must* and *we*. The subject should be written in the beginning, before *to be* or an auxiliary, except for interrogative sentences. In addition to this, the word *to* must be omitted as it is not grammatical to use it in this type of sentence or phrase. So, instead of having *must we to accept*, the phrase *we must accept* should be employed.

Conclusion

To conclude, the students producing sentences in the papers analyzed by the researchers have difficulties in using gerunds or gerund phrases and to infinitives or to infinitive phrases. The level of understanding varies from

one student to another. Above all, this linguistic findings should be able to be contributive and used by teachers or lecturers in order to improve students' understanding or abilities in using gerunds and to infinitives. As implied in the discussion, students' linguistic backgrounds might play a very important role for this. So, is expected that this will also contribute to the teaching of English as a foreign language.

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